



Visiting Your Member of Parliament: A Friendly Encounter

Introduction

We are often asked to contact our elected officials to promote positive policies in areas that concern us. What are some of the general principles we should know?

Present concerns sincerely and from the heart, seeking truth. You do not have to have all the answers. A few solidly based points are all you need to open the conversation. You are **starting a relationship**, and both you and the MP will **learn from each other**.

If the MP that you are visiting is from a party whose policy on the issue is very different from what you hope for, it can be hard to feel like you have enough in common to be able to converse naturally. Try to remember that the MP is an individual who may disagree to some extent with the line that his or her party has taken. You are there to speak to the Light in this person, and to listen for it. It may be good for the MP to have been exposed to a different point of view and to know that some of their constituents feel strongly about this. Every MP has a role to play, regardless of party affiliation.

If you have an opportunity to speak to non-elected government workers in a department related to your concern, do. It is also possible to catch a few minutes of an MP's time if you turn up at their local constituency occasions, whether it be opening a women's shelter or a bridge. The preparation and approach to follow will help you take advantage of any opportunity.

"Our MP has a constituency office time during which any constituent can make a short appointment. We have had up to an hour with a Cabinet Minister because no one else turned up!"

- Trevor Chandler

Preparation

There should be **more than one person** going to a meeting with an MP. It will be important to have more than one person's memory of the conversation. Your visiting team (max. 5 people, including some voters in the MP's riding) should take time to prepare together, **designating roles and points**. Specify what action you will request the MP to take. Inform yourself enough on the issue that you are clear in your mind, and you have learned what the

typical opposing arguments are. Bring texts or evidence to the meeting. Refer to the cpi website canadianpeaceinitiative.ca

Try to be aware of **your own prejudices**, as well as **those of the MP**. Consult the parliamentary website <http://www.parl.gc.ca/>. From the MP's own website, you can find out their background, voting history and what committees they sit on. MPs will likely prefer to meet for 30 minutes, and you want time for exchange. You can plan to meet more than once. Mail or e-mail a one page letter requesting an appointment and identifying yourselves and the topic, **noting if you are voters in the MP's riding**. This helps the MP's support staff keep track of your request. Having a good human relationship with them is important!

Face to Face

Be on time. Use waiting time to read the promotional material in the office, build rapport with support staff. For the conversation itself:

- Be respectful at all times, be affirming and curious. Show your awareness of the MP's existing statements or connections to the issue and build on them. Ask questions to thoroughly understand the MP's point of view. **What common ground can you find?**
- Lots of eye contact is good. Taking notes is good. So try to share the note-taking role among the team.
- Confidentiality may be a consideration in the conversation. **Ask what information can be shared**, or set ground rules as appropriate.
- Ask the MP's advice about how the concern can be pursued and what they think they may do.
- **Sum up your points at the end** and ask how they would like to receive further information. What is the easiest channel for them?

Follow-up is extremely important. After thanking them for their time, inform CPI of the results of your visit. Be sure to send any information that you have promised.

Finally, **don't be discouraged!** Be encouraged by the human interaction of the encounter. Look for signs of hope, and follow them up. **Remember: you don't have to be an expert on the issue. Members meet with you because you elect them. They represent you, acting and speaking on your behalf. Focus on your shared moral values and how they impact on the issues. It's likely your MP will not be an expert on the issues either!**

Background for a Letter or Meeting with your MP

Following are some suggestions to be used as information for a letter or as introduction at a meeting with a clear request for the MP to support a Bill to establish a department of peace

We are the Canadian Peace Initiative (CPI). We are part of The Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures of Peace (GAMIP), a worldwide community of some 50 countries dedicated to establishing national ministries and departments of peace. Some countries already have such ministries: Nepal, the Solomon Islands, and Costa Rica.

To this end, we sponsored a private member's bill in House 40 on September 30, 2009, and reintroduced the bill in House 41 on November 30, 2011, as Bill C-373.

Our vision for establishing a Department of Peace is to work towards developing a culture of peace and nonviolent resolution of conflict that includes peace education, human and economic rights, arms control and nuclear disarmament, and violence prevention. We support the establishment of a Civilian Peace Service of professionals and practitioners specialized in prevention, mediation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

Civilian Peace Services Canada (CPSC) is a registered charity and currently assesses and accredits Peace Professionals based on core values that underlie and motivate effective performance, and key competencies that enable effective performance.

The aim is an established peace profession and an effective department of peace.

Peace and the Trudeau Government

The new government has characterized itself as committed to peace in many ways. Stopping bombing in Iraq, accepting Syrian refugees, the small arms treaty, other global treaties, and peace aspirations all signal a change in our global affairs leadership. "Canada is back on the global stage" speaks to change towards peace and away from fear. The values and aspirations of all Canadians, and the global community for that matter, will be well served by the achievement of mandates.

- We are extremely gratified and pleased and fully supportive of the peace initiatives as expressed in your government's ministerial mandate letters.
- We cannot overstate how much we welcome the strong commitment of the government to peace.
- We will undertake outreach to all MPs to build a consensus on our shared commitment to peace.

- We offer our experience and support to further the achievement of your mandate. We offer former military, academic, and practising professionals in peace services and conflict resolution and international development.
- We ask that all parties realize the current gap in government in regards to a lead agency for building peace and determine that a Department of Peace is the solution to bridge this gap.

Extracts from Liberal Mandate Letters to Ministers and Our Requests

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MANDATE LETTER EXTRACT

“As Minister of Foreign Affairs, your overarching goal will be to restore constructive Canadian leadership in the world and to advance Canada’s interests. This renewed leadership will serve our security and economic interests, but it will also support the deeply held Canadian desire to make a real and valuable contribution to a more peaceful and prosperous world.”

We request the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

- Work with the Minister of National Defence to increase Canada’s support for United Nations peace operations and its mediation, conflict-prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts;
- Work to champion the values of inclusive and accountable governance, peaceful pluralism, and respect for diversity, and human rights, including the rights of women and refugees.

DND MANDATE LETTER EXTRACT

“As Minister of National Defence, your overarching goal will be to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces are prepared to protect Canadian sovereignty, defend North America, provide disaster relief, conduct search and rescue, support United Nations peace operations, and contribute to the security of our allies and to allied and coalition operations abroad.”

We request the Minister of National Defence:

- Work to end Canada’s combat mission in Iraq and Syria, refocusing Canada’s efforts in the region on the training of local forces and humanitarian support.
- Work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to renew Canada’s commitment to United Nations peace operations. This includes making Canada’s specialized capabilities—from mobile medical teams, to engineering support, to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel.
- Work to help the United Nations respond more quickly to emerging and escalating conflicts and providing well-trained personnel to international initiatives that can be

quickly deployed, and leading an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations.

- Conduct a review process to create a new defence strategy for Canada.
- Work with the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence to develop a suicide prevention strategy for Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS MANDATE LETTER EXTRACT

“As Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, your overarching goal will be to renew the relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. This renewal must be a nation-to-nation relationship, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. I expect you to re-engage in a renewed nation-to-nation process with Indigenous Peoples to make real progress on the issues most important to First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit communities.”

We request the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs:

- Work with Truth and Reconciliation Offices to address the 94 recommendations nationally and locally increasing change through understanding.

Meeting Process, CPI Information and Requests

Who We Are

- Awareness of CPI and what we do
- The bigger international alliance: Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures of Peace

Current Status

- Borys Wrzesnewskyj will table the first reading of the bill to introduce the establishment of a federal department of peace.
- Borys Wrzesnewskyj will review and amend the bill in the near future.

What We Need

What we want from the MP contacted:

- Seconders for the first reading of a private member's bill
- Co-seconders for the second reading
- A sponsor for the second reading
- Support for peace operations as defined by government policy and mandate letters
- MPs to sponsor an evening or other events on Parliament Hill facilities to promote a Department of Peace
- MPs to sponsor a round table discussion or public forum in their riding to promote a Department of Peace
- MPs to support the development of a government bill
- MPs to support an all-party committee to review, analyze, and develop peace policies and practices
- MPs to support peace professionals to sit on parliamentary committees to observe and contribute to best practices

How We Can Help

- Explore ways we can help the MP to achieve his or her mandate or interests.
- Explore situations of relevance to MP and CPI.
- Listen to the MP for his or her needs and points of view (make notes).

Confirm Next Steps

Confirm who will do what as a result of the meeting.

- What the MP will do?
- What will you and/or CPI provide or do?
- Will there be a next meeting? When?
- Exchange contact details.
- Take a group photo with MP and publicize on your website and provide to CPI representatives so that they can publicize on the CPI website and newsletter